TRIBUTARY

UTAH DIVISION OF WATER RESOURCES
WATER CONSERVATION, EDUCATION & SPECIAL STUDIES NEWSLETTER FALL 2005

Fall Lawn Maintenance

By Dr. Kelly Kopp, USU Extension Water Conservation and Turfgrass Specialist

There are a number of things that you can do to prepare your lawn for the winter and to ensure that it comes back strong in the fall. The cool night temperatures we are currently experiencing are probably already strengthening your lawn after the hot and dry summer. You may be noticing improved grass color and density. Now is the perfect time to enhance the grass's recovery with a few simple steps.

USU Extension Services

After the summer, it is likely that your lawn needs some supplemental fertilization. Nitrogen will be needed in the largest quantity and you should apply 1 pound of slow-release nitrogen fertilizer per thousand square feet of lawn. This will help the lawn to recover from summer stresses and will further improve grass color and density.

As the cooler weather intensifies, you will also be able to stop irrigating your lawn. It's easy to forget that changes in the program of your irrigation controller are necessary at this time of the year. The grass does not need as much irrigation as it did during the heat of the summer and it's the perfect opportunity for conservation. A great deal of water can be wasted in the fall because irrigation controllers are not adjusted for the cooler temperatures.

As it gets even cooler and winter is just around the corner, you will notice that your lawn is growing much more slowly. At some point, you will perform your last mowing of the growing season. This is a critical time in the life and health of your lawn. Hopefully you have been mowing at a height of 2 1/2 –3 1/2 inches to promote root growth and stress tolerance. This is a good practice, but not a good one to follow with your final mowing of the season. This last mowing should be much shorter, from 1 to 1 1/2 inches. Mowing at this shorter height will not leave long grass blades over the winter that can lay over and increase humidity beneath snow cover. If the grass blades are very long, and there is lengthy snow cover, a disease called snow mold may occur.

After your final mowing is also the best time to apply your last fertilization of the growing season. Once again, nitrogen is of primary concern. Following your last mowing, you'll want to apply 1 pound of quick-release nitrogen fertilizer per thousand square feet of lawn. It's important that the nitrogen source be quick-release so that the grass can take it up before going dormant due to cold. This is probably the most critical fertilization of the entire growing season and should not be missed! Research has shown that this late fall fertilization provides the most benefit and drought tolerance to the lawn the FOLLOWING summer.

These simple steps will ensure that your lawn makes it not only through the winter, but into next summer healthy and stronger.

Fall – A Great Time for Reevaluating Grass Areas

By Dennis Hinkamp, Extension Communications Specialist

High water bills, sprinkler repair, lawn mower tune-ups and grass stains on the kids clothes. Aren't lawns wonderful?

Fall is a great time for reevaluating grass areas and other places in the landscape, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. Large areas of turf can be removed and new grass planted to improve the condition. Cooler fall temperatures are great for starting a lawn and planting any shrubs, trees and perennials.

There are many reasons for having lawn, Goodspeed explains. One is to beautify the landscape and cool the surrounding areas. If the area is used mainly to play on, grass may be the best option. But, if the only thing the grass does is cause ulcers and eat up your money, time and energy, then there may be better options.

Lawns can be a waste of time, water and other resources, he says. Many people plant a large lawn because they believe it will be a low maintenance, easy alternative to "real" landscaping. Consider a few things before planting a whole half-acre in grass.

Grass plants are the worse offenders of wasted water in the landscape. They consume more water, and are harder to keep healthy, than most other plants. Keeping a lawn healthy also consumes more fertilizer, specifically nitrogen, and can use more pesticides than other plants. Think about the time and money spent mowing, fertilizing, watering, controlling pests and weeds, edging and fretting over a healthy lawn.

“I’m not suggesting that we eliminate all lawn areas, but we should look at why we have a lawn,” Goodspeed says. “Consider alternatives. A smaller turf area or some ground cover may provide what we need in the landscape and save natural resources that are likely to be limited in the near future.”

One concept to consider is using grass as an oasis or bed area in the landscape, he suggests. Instead of a large area of lawn surrounding a small patch of shrubs, try planting a small patch of turf surrounded by trees, shrubs and a few perennials. Cover the planting beds with a weed barrier and bark or some other material, thus reducing the amount of maintenance required.

This method of planting conserves water because the trees and other plants can be watered with a drip system every 7 to 10 days, he adds. Even existing sprinkler systems can be modified to save water. Trees and shrubs thrive when they are watered correctly. A small lawn's sprinkler system can be set to water every four to five days, and it may only take 15 minutes to mow the entire area.


USU Extension Services

If an oasis is not a possibility, consider shrinking the grass area and adding ground cover or other plants to reduce the amount of grass, Goodspeed says. Other alternatives include using ground covers to fill in areas around the yard. Many ground covers can tolerate some foot traffic and other abuse. They make nice fillers between rocks and stones, softening yardscapes and requiring less maintenance and time than a lawn.

Make lawn alterations by late September so the seed is established by the time the water is shut off and the first hard freeze comes, he says. This allows the roots to keep growing and spreading throughout the fall.

Calendar of Events

For more events, please visit: www.conservewater.utah.gov/calendar

October 14-16, 2005

2005 Annual Bioneers Conference
USU Campus, Logan

The Annual Bioneers Conference is a hub of practical solutions for restoring the Earth and people. Bioneers draw from four billion years of evolutionary intelligence and apply the knowledge in practical ways to serve human ends harmlessly. We herald a dawning age of interdependence founded in natural principles of diversity, kinship, community, cooperation and reciprocity. For more information, please call (800) 538-2663.